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ABSTRACT

This study in[illegible]estigated elementary and secondary teachers' morale levels and their percep[illegible]ions of the morale levels of their colleagues. Between April 1998 and April 1[illegible]99, participating teachers completed the Teacher Outlook and Perception[illegible] Survey, which contained 47 items reflecting their work experiences and wha[illegible] they see in the future for their jobs. Data analysis indicated that the mo[illegible]ale defined by the group was an inaccurate assessment of teachers' indivi[illegible]ual morale levels. The elements within the building did not predict indiv[illegible]dual morale and colleague's morale in the same way. The similar ratios of ind[illegible]vidual morale compared to colleague's morale indicated that peer assessment was not the best way to ascertain the morale in a building. The results ind[illegible]cate that teacher morale is primarily independent of the morale exhi[illegible]ited by colleagues. Although individual morale and the morale exhibited by co[illegible]leagues are correlated, school factors influence the two in varying m[illegible]gnitudes. The results suggest that student behavior and learning have a m[illegible]ch greater impact on teacher morale than does administrative behavior. An ap[illegible]endix contains the survey instrument. (SM)

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A Comparative Analysis of Teachers' Individual Morale Levels and Their Assessed Morale Levels of Colleagues

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Introduction

Morale is a murky concept, albeit an important one. It is related to job turnover, absenteeism, and organizational commitment. Research conducted by Cattell and Child (1958) and Smith (1971) concludes that morale is a group phenomenon which manifests itself through one's perception of self in the context of the organization. However, in an organization such as schools where people work in isolation of their peers, a group approach to morale is problematic. Teaching is an occupation in which the teacher tends to work away from his peers. If an overall "generic" level of morale exists within a building, what is its source?

Recent research (Doherty, 1995; Evans, 1998) has challenged the group approach to morale, asserting that morale exists within the individual. A great deal of this research has been qualitative and there has been little, if any, quantitative investigation of individual morale. It would seem that organizational problems such as absenteeism and job commitment may be more closely associated with individual morale than with the group morale described by earlier researchers.

Research Problems

The first research problem involved the comparative analysis of teachers' self-rated morale levels and their assessments of colleagues' overall morale level. If morale is manifested through the group, then teachers' self-assessments of their morale levels should be similar to the overall morale level they perceive from their colleagues.

The second research problem involved the exploration of whether differences exist in what predicts an individual teacher's morale level and what predicts the estimated

morale level of peers. If morale is actually manifested through the group, then the same factors should predict both in similar ways.

Theoretical Framework

The study was based on a morale model developed by Anderson (1999). It defines morale as a "psychological state which stems from the interaction of job-related fulfillment of needs, anticipated fulfillment of needs, and perceived obstacles to needs fulfillment." The morale model is based on an extensive literature review of morale and motivation research (Deci, 1994; Evans, 1992; Guion, 1958). The definition and model of morale were supported by the findings of two previous studies conducted by this researcher. It should be noted that although the instrument used in the study was specific to teaching, the morale definition and model are applicable to any job.

Methods

Data from four separate studies were used to investigate the research problems. The first study involved 95 elementary teachers from three small school districts. The second involved 60 middle school teachers from a building in a large urban district. The third study involved 308 elementary teachers, representing 41 schools in a large urban district. The fourth involved 77 teachers from 8 buildings in a suburban district. The response rate was 85% for the first study, 90% for the second, 40% for the third study and 60% for the fourth. Data were collected between April,1998 and April,1999.

For each study, building principals were contacted and asked if they would allow their building to participate in a school climate survey. Reference to the term "morale" was avoided in order to prevent response bias. Packets were delivered to buildings. The packets included a cover letter for the building administrator and cover letters and

surveys for the teachers. A "key" person in each building was identified to collect and return the surveys.

Data Source and Evidence

The Teacher Outlook and Perceptions Survey (Anderson, 1999) was administered to the teachers. The survey consists of 47 items reflecting teachers' work experiences and what they see in the future for their job. Respondents were asked to indicate the extent of their agreement to each item using a 7-point Likert scale. In the four separate studies, the instrument produced an overall scale with Cronbach alpha reliability coefficients ranging from .89 to .92.

Data Treatment

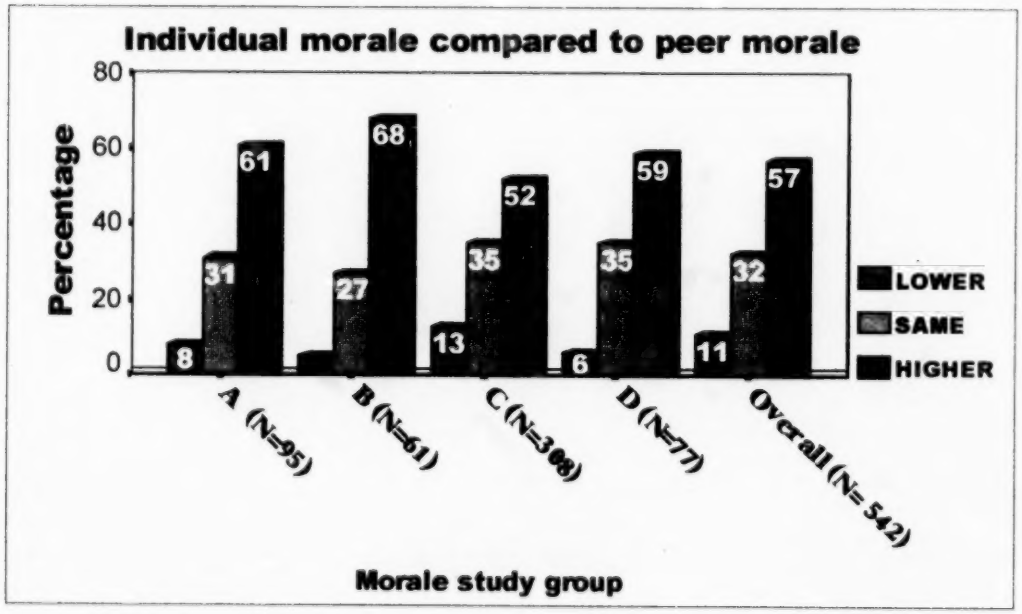
Responses were entered into an SPSS database. For the first research problem, responses to two global items on the Teacher Outlook and Perceptions Survey were compared. They were item 8, "My overall level of morale is high," and item 31, "The overall morale demonstrated by my colleagues is low." Responses were recoded with values ranging from –3 to +3 and added together to create a new variable indicating the extent that one viewed his morale as the same or different from his colleagues' overall morale. For example, if one "strongly agreed" that his overall morale level was high and "strongly agreed" that the overall morale exhibited by colleagues was low, the added score would be +6. Positive scores indicated that the respondents viewed their morale levels as higher than that of their colleagues. Respondents who assessed their morale as being lower than that of their peers produced negative scores. Scores of zero indicated the individual morale and group morale levels were the same.

For examination of the second research problem, the data sets from the four studies were compiled for factor analysis. The factor analysis was used to identify underlying themes within the survey items and develop reliability scales ($\alpha > .60$). The factors were used in two listwise regression analyses. Individual teacher morale was treated as the dependent variable in the first analysis. The overall level of morale exhibited by colleagues was used as the dependent variable in the second analysis.

Results

Individual and Colleague Morale. For the first research problem, the four studies produced nearly identical results. Very similar ratios for those assessing their morale as lower, the same, and higher than that of their peers was evident. Figure I presents the results.

Figure I
Comparison of Individual Morale and Assessed
Colleague's Morale Levels for Four Separate Studies and Total



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Predictors of Individual and Colleague Morale. Factor analysis using varimax rotation produced nine factors that accounted for approximately 57% of the overall variance. The factors were labeled "Administrative Issues," "Student and Classroom Experiences," "Anticipated Outlook of the Job," "Workload and Demands," "Peer Support," "Conflict," "Mastery of Curriculum," "Intrinsic Eagerness," and "Basic Resources." Scales for the first five factors could be developed with $\alpha > .60$. The remaining four factors had only two or three items with factor loadings greater than .40. Items with high factor loadings could be developed into scales with alpha reliability coefficients between .37 and .47.

When used in a listwise regression analysis, approximately 54% of the variance in individual morale was explained by the nine factors, while 41% of the variance in colleague morale was explained by the nine factors (see Table 1). When taking into account the other factors, Student and Classroom Experiences was the strongest predictor of individual teacher morale. Independently, Student and Classroom Experiences explained 25% of the variance and Administrative Issues independently accounted for 14% of the variance in individual teacher morale when taking into account the remaining nine factors. Peer Support explained only 2% of the variance in individual teacher morale and 3% of the variance in colleague morale when taking into account the other factors. These results support the argument that morale is not specifically manifested through the group.

Administrative Issues and Conflict were the strongest predictors of colleague morale. Both independently accounted for 10% of the variance when taking into account the other factors. Anticipated Outlook of the Job Situation was also a reliable predictor

of colleague morale. It independently accounted for 9% of the overall variance. Student and Classroom Experiences and Workload and Demands both independently accounted for 4% of the variance in colleague morale when taking into the other factors (Table 1).

Table I
Regression Analyses Using Nine Factors as
Predictors of Individual and Colleague Morale Levels

	β		Corr		Unique		T		Sig T	
Variable	I	C	I	C	I	C	I	C	I	C
Administrative Issues	.62	-.63	.38	-.32	.14	.10	12.95	-9.74	.00	.00
Student and Classroom Experiences	.82	-.39	.50	-.20	.25	.04	17.17	-5.99	.00	.00
Anticipated Outlook of the Job Situation	.39	-.57	.24	-.30	.06	.09	8.11	-8.89	.00	.00
Workload and Demands	-.36	.40	-.22	.20	.05	.04	-7.49	6.15	.00	.00
Peer Support	.21	-.36	.13	-.19	.02	.03	4.43	5.63	.00	.00
Conflict	-.11	.60	-.07	.31	.01	.10	-2.33	9.30	.02	.00
Mastery of the Curriculum	.16	.10	.10	.05	.01	.003	3.38	1.61	.00	.11
Intrinsic Eagerness	.19	-.03	.12	-.01	.01	.002	3.93	-.45	.00	.66
Basic Resources	-.10	.20	-.06	.10	.003	.01	-2.05	3.12	.04	.002

	Individual morale	Colleagues' morale
R	.74	.65
R^2	.54	.41

Note: I = Individual morale, C = Colleagues' morale, N = 542

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Conclusion

These findings suggest that the morale defined by the group is an inaccurate assessment of one's individual morale level. The elements within the building do not predict individual morale and colleague's morale in the same way.

The similar ratios of individual morale compared to colleagues' morale also indicate that peer assessment is not the best way to ascertain the morale in a building. Although the results of the third and fourth studies may be partially attributed to the low response rate, this explanation can not feasibly account for the results of the first and second studies, which had response rates over 80%.

The results of this analysis provide statistical evidence that teacher morale is primarily independent of the morale exhibited by colleagues. Although individual morale and the morale exhibited by colleagues are correlated, school factors influence the two in varying magnitudes.

Research on morale has generally emphasized management's influence on the morale of workers. The results of this study suggest that student behavior and learning have a much greater impact on teacher morale than does administrative behavior. Administrators may influence teacher morale more substantially through policies and practices that influence student behavior and learning and teacher workload.

Implications for Practice

The results of this study suggest that teachers may not have an accurate understanding of their colleagues' morale. Administrators may wish to develop ways of improved communication amongst teaching staff. It may also be helpful for teachers to

recognize that the complaints and negative messages conveyed by colleagues do not provide a complete picture of the morale in the building.

Administrative style appears to have a substantially weak influence on individual morale when compared to student influence on morale. It should not be concluded that administrative prace doesn't matter. Instead, adminsitrators may wish to examine the things they can do to influence student behavior and learning, which in turn may influence teacher morale.

Implications for Research

The consistent outcome of individual morale being higher than colleague morale is a key finding. The results of this study have strong implications in the areas of group dynamics, organizational theory, and social psychology. There are several things that could explain this tendency for individuals to see their morale as more positive than that of their peers. One reason may be that topics of conversation between teachers tend to be negative (e.g., griping, arguing), causing others to perceive the overall morale of the colleagues as being low. Another explanation may be a desire within individuals to see themselves as better off than their peers. A third possibility may be a tendency for teachers to not be completely honest with themselves when reflecting on their morale. Any one of these considerations warrants further examination because it can contribute to our understanding of organizations. It could also be very useful to systematically investigate the differences between individual morale and perceptions of colleagues' morale in organizations outside of education.

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Appendix

Teacher and Outlook and Perceptions Survey

For each statement, please circle your response.

1 Strongly Disagree 2 = Mostly Disagree 3 = Slightly Disagree 4 = Undecided
5 = Slightly Agree 6 = Mostly Agree 7 = Strongly Agree

1. I have enough materials to meet my students' needs.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. When needed, I can rely on my colleagues for assistance.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. I am supervised closely to ensure that I follow procedures carefully.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. My students appreciate my efforts.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5. I feel pressured by my colleagues to be consistent with their practices in the classroom, even if I disagree with them.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6. My students are achieving at what I consider their expected level.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7. I feel that I am successful in my teaching endeavors.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8. My level of morale is high.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
9. Other teachers have utilized my ideas in their classrooms.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
10. I feel in charge when I teach.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
11. The administration at my building listens and attends to my concerns.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
12. My suggestions for school improvements are basically ignored.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
13. I enjoy teaching my students.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
14. There are teachers in my building that I consider close friends.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
15. The administration at my building adheres strictly to discipline policies and procedures.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
16. I am uncertain about the direction our building is heading academically.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
17. There is a sense of order in my building.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

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18. Each year I teach, I look forward to trying new things in the classroom.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
19. There is little opportunity for growth in my position.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
20. I am pleased by the possible changes ahead for my school.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
21. My principal is aware of my strengths and abilities.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
22. My teaching is limited by budget constraints.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
23. The overall morale exhibited by my colleagues seems low.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
24. In disciplinary matters, my administrator supports me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
25. Required paperwork and red tape absorb an unreasonable amount of my time.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
26. I feel comfortable discussing school problems with my principal.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
27. The curriculum I use needs a great deal of modification.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
28. There is a sense of belonging in my school.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
29. For the most part, my work with students is highly satisfying and rewarding.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
30. The principal at my building values my input on school issues.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
31. I am given the flexibility to alter the curriculum to meet my students' needs.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
32. I often feel that my efforts to reach my students are futile.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
33. I have an adequate amount of planning time.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
34. Student threats to staff are a concern in my building.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

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35. I see the district placing unreasonable demands on teachers in the future.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
36. Changes proposed for our school will do little to help solve present problems.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
37. I frequently feel irritated by my students' actions.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
38. I made the right decision in choosing a career in education..	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
39. My work is easier and more enjoyable because of my principal.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
40. There is a great deal of bickering, and taking sides among our staff.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
41. My principal has realistic expectations of the teachers in this building.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
42. I expect student behavior to decline in the years ahead.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
43. I experience an undue amount of stress and strain from teaching.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
44. I have an unreasonable work load.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
45. My students are generally friendly and pleasant to interact with.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
46. My colleagues do not provide encouragement.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
47. I am optimistic about changes in our school.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

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